

NORTHERN  
NUMBERS  
— BEING —  
REPRESENTATIVE  
SELECTIONS FROM  
CERTAIN LIVING  
SCOTTISH POETS

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# NORTHERN NUMBERS





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REPRESENTATIVE SELECTIONS  
FROM CERTAIN LIVING  
SCOTTISH POETS

*Christopher Murray Grieve*  
11

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THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED  
WITH AFFECTION AND PRIDE  
TO  
NEIL MUNRO



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## FOREWORD

**T**HIS collection does not pretend to be in any sense an anthology of contemporary Scottish poetry. It merely consists of representative selections (chosen by the contributors themselves) from the—mainly current—work of certain Scottish poets of to-day—and to-morrow!

Many contemporary writers of the highest merit, whose work will unquestionably be given a place in any future anthology of Scottish poetry embracing the output of the twentieth century, have not been invited to contribute to this volume. The chief reason for that lies in the fact that for the most part the contributors to this volume are close personal friends, and that this is rather an experiment in group-publication than an anthology.

Group-poetry developments have been a marked feature of recent British publishing. Success has largely justified the method. It is hoped that the present volume may do for some of the leading tendencies in contemporary Scottish poetry what the "Georgian Poetry" series has done for a particular group of mainly-English poets of our period.

If this venture is sufficiently successful, subsequent volumes (which it is hoped will permit of the inclusion of poetical dramas as well) will be published at convenient intervals. No new contributor will, however, be admitted without the approval of a majority of the present group.

Whatever royalties accrue on this volume will be devoted towards securing the publication of subsequent similar volumes, or towards the furtherance of such other schemes for the promotion of Scottish literature as may commend themselves to the present contributors. My thanks are due to many publishers and editors who originally printed the majority of these poems. Space does not permit, unfortunately, of more detailed acknowledgment—in this edition!

C. M. G.





# JOHN BUCHAN

FRATRI DILECTISSIMO—FISHER JAMIE—  
FROM THE PENTLANDS, LOOKING NORTH  
AND SOUTH



# FRATRI DILECTISSIMO

W. H. B.

**W**HEN we were little wandering boys,  
And every hill was blue and high,  
On ballad ways and martial joys  
We fed our fancies, you and I.  
With Bruce we crouched in bracken shade;  
With Douglas charged the Paynim foes;  
And oft in moorland noons I played  
Colkitto to your grave Montrose.

The obliterating seasons flow—  
They cannot kill our boyish game.  
Though creeds may change and kings may go,  
Yet burns undimmed the ancient flame.  
While young men in their pride make haste,  
The wrong to right, the bond to free,  
And plant a garden in the waste,  
Still rides our Scottish chivalry.

Another end had held your dream—  
To die fulfilled of hope and might,  
To pass in one swift, rapturous gleam  
From mortal to immortal light—  
But through long hours of labouring breath,  
You watched the world grow small and far,  
And met the constant eyes of Death,  
And haply knew how kind they are.

One boon the Fates relenting gave—  
Not where the scented hill-wind blows  
From cedar thickets lies your grave,  
Nor 'mid the steep Himálayan snows.  
Night calls the stragglers to the nest,  
And at long-last 'tis home indeed  
For your far-wandering feet to rest  
For ever by the crooks of Tweed.

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

In perfect honour, perfect truth,  
And gentleness to all mankind,  
You trod the golden paths of youth,  
Then left the world and youth behind.  
Ah, no! 'tis we who fade and fail—  
And you, from Time's slow torments free,  
Shall pass from strength to strength and scale  
The steps of immortality.

Dear heart, in that serener air,  
If blessed souls may backward gaze,  
Some slender nook of memory spare,  
For our old happy moorland days.  
I sit alone and musing fills  
My breast with pain that shall not die,  
Till once again o'er greener hills,  
We ride together, you and I.

1912.

## FISHER JAMIE

**P**UIR Jamie's killed. A better lad  
Ye wadna find to busk a flee  
Or burn a püle or wield a gad  
Frae Berwick to the Clints o' Dee.

And noo he's in a happier land.—  
It's Gospel truith and Gospel law  
That Heaven's yett maun open stand  
To folk that for their country fa'.

But Jamie will be ill to mate;  
He lo'ed nae mäsic, kenned nae tünas  
Except the sang o' Tweed in spate,  
Or Talla loupin' ower its linns.

I sair misdoot that Jamie's heid  
A croun o' gowd will never please;  
He liked a kep o' dacent tweed  
Whaur he could stick his casts o' flees.

If Heaven is a' that man can dream,  
And a' that honest herts can wish,  
It maun provide some muirland stream,  
For Jamie dreamed o' nocht but fish.

And weel I wot he'll up and speir,  
In his bit blate and canty way,  
Wi' kind apostles standin' near,  
Whae in their time were fishers tae.

He'll offer back his gowden croun,  
And in its place a rod he'll seek,  
And bashfu'-like his herp lay down,  
And speir a leister and a cleck.

For Jim's had aye a poachin' whim;  
He'll sune grow tired, wi' lawfu' flee

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

Made frae the wings of cherubim,  
O' castin' ower the Crystal Sea. . . .

I picter him at gloamin' tide,  
Steekin' the back door o' his hame,  
And hastin' to the waterside  
To play again the auld, auld game.

And syne wi' saumon on his back,  
Catch't clean against the heavenly law,  
And heavenly byliffs on his track,  
Gaun linkin' doun some heavenly shaw.

1916.

# FROM THE PENTLANDS,

## LOOKING NORTH AND SOUTH.

**A**ROUND my feet the clouds are drawn  
In the cold mystery of the dawn;  
No breezes cheer, no guests intrude  
My mossy mist-clad solitude.  
When sudden down the steep of sky  
Flames a long lightening wind. On high  
The steel-blue arch shines clear, and far  
In the low-lands where cattle are  
Towns smoke. And swift, a haze, a gleam—  
The Firth lies like a frozen stream,  
Reddening with morn. Tall spires of ships,  
Like thorns about the harbour's lips,  
Now shake faint canvas, now, asleep,  
Their salt, uneasy slumbers keep;  
While golden-grey o'er kirk and wall  
Day wakes in the ancient capital.

Before me lie the lists of strife,  
The caravanserai of life,  
Whence from the gates the merchants go  
On the world's highways; to and fro  
Sail laden ships; and in the street  
The lone foot-traveller shakes his feet,  
And in some corner by the fire  
Tells the old tale of heart's desire.  
Thither from alien seas and skies  
Comes the far-quested merchandise—  
Wrought silks of Broussa, Mocha's ware  
Brown-tinted, fragrant, and the rare  
Thin perfumes that the rose's breath  
Has sought, immortal in her death;  
Gold, gems, and spice, and haply still  
The red rough largess of the hill,  
Which takes the sun and bears the vines  
Among the haunted Apennines,

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

And he who treads the cobbled street  
To-day in the cold North may meet,  
Come month, come year, the dusky East  
And share the Caliph's secret feast;  
Or in the toil of wind and sun  
Bear pilgrim-staff, forlorn, fordone,  
Till o'er the steppe, athwart the sand  
Gleam the far gates of Samarkand.  
The ringing quay, the weathered face,  
Fair skies, dusk hands, the ocean race,  
The palm-girt isle, the frosty shore,  
Gales and hot suns the wide world o'er,  
Grey North, red South, and burnished West,  
The goals of the old tireless quest.  
Leap in the smoke, immortal, free  
Where shines yon morning fringe of sea.

I turn—how still the moorlands lie  
Sleep-locked beneath the awakening sky!  
The film of morn is silver-grey  
On the young heather, and away,  
Dim, distant, set in ribs of hill,  
Green glens are shining, stream, and mill,  
Clachan and kirk and garden ground  
All silent in the hush profound,  
Which haunts alone the hills' recess,  
The antique home of quietness.  
Nor to the folk can piper play  
The tune of "Hills and Far Away,"  
For they are with them. Morn can fire  
No peaks of weary heart's desire,  
Nor the red sunset flame behind  
Some ancient ridge of longing mind.  
For Arcady is here, around,  
In lilt of stream, in the clear sound  
Of lark and moorbird, in the bold



## JOHN BUCHAN

Gay glamour of the evening gold.  
And so the wheel of seasons move  
To kirk and market, to mild loves  
And modest hates, and still the sight  
Of brown, kind faces, and when night  
Draws dark around with age and fear  
Theirs is the simple hope to cheer.  
A land of peace where lost romance  
And ghostly shine of helm and lance  
Still dwell by castled scarp and lea  
And the lost homes of chivalry.  
And the good fairy folk, my dear,  
Who speak for cunning souls to hear,  
In crook of glen and bower of hill  
Sing of the Happy Ages still.

O Thou to whom man's heart is known,  
Grant me my morning orison.  
Grant me the rover's path—to see  
The dawn arise, the daylight flee  
In the far wastes of sand and sun!  
Grant me with venturous heart to run  
On the old highway, where in pain  
And ecstasy man strives amain,  
Outstrips his fellows, or, too weak,  
Finds the great rest that wanderers seek!  
Grant me the joy of wind and brine,  
The zest of food, the taste of wine,  
The fighter's strength, the echoing strife,  
The high tumultuous lists of life—  
May I ne'er lag, nor hapless fall,  
Nor weary at the battle-call!  
But when the even brings surcease  
Grant me the happy moorland peace;  
That in my heart's depth ever lie  
That ancient land of heath and sky,

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

Where the old rhymes and stories fall  
In kindly, soothing pastoral.  
There in the hills sweet silence lies,  
And Death himself wears friendly guise;  
There be my lot, my twilight stage,  
Dear city of my pilgrimage.

1898.

# VIOLET JACOB

THE WHUSTLIN' LAD—HOGMANAY—THE  
HOWE O' THE MEARNIS—CRAIGO WOODS—  
JOCK, TO THE FIRST ARMY



## THE WHUSTLIN' LAD

**T**HERE'S a wind comes doon frae the braes when  
the licht is spreadin'  
Chilly an' grey,  
And the auld cock craws at the yett o' the muirland  
steadin'  
Cryin' on day;  
The hoose lies sound an' the sma' mune's deein' and weary,  
Watchin' her lane,  
The shadows creep by the dyke an' the time seems eerie,  
But the lad i' the fields he is whustlin', whustlin' cheery,  
'Yont i' the rain.

My mither stirs as she wauks wi' her twa een blinkin';  
Bedded she'll bide,  
For foo can an auld wife ken what a lassie's thinkin'  
Close at her side?  
Mither, lie still, for ye're needin' a rest fu' sairly,  
Weary an' worn,  
Mither, I'll rise, an' ye ken I'll be warkin' fairly—  
An' I dinna ken *wha* can be whustlin', whustlin' airly  
Lang or it's morn!

Gin ye hear a soond like the sneck o' the back-door turnin',  
Fash na for it;  
It's just the crack i' the lum o' the green wood burnin',  
Ill to be lit;  
Gin ye hear a step, it's the auld mear loose i' the stable,  
Stampin' the strae,  
Or mysel' that's settin' the parritch-spunes on the table,  
Sae turn ye aboot an' sleep, mither, sleep while ye're able,  
Rest while ye may.

Up at the steadin' the trail of the mist has liftit  
Clear frae the ground,  
Mither breathes saft an' her face to the wa' she's shiftit—  
Aye, but she's soond!

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

“Lad, ye may come, for there’s nane but mysel’ will hear ye  
Oot by the stair,  
But whustle you on, an’ I winna hae need to fear ye,  
For, laddie, the lips that keep whustlin’, whustlin’ cheery,  
Canna dae mair!”

# HOGMANAY

*to a Pipe Tune*

O H, it's fine when the New and the Auld Year meet,  
An' the lads gang roarin' i' the lichtit street,  
An' there's me and there's Alick an' the miller's loon,  
An' Geordie, that's the piper oot o' F'orfar toon.

Geordie Faa! Geordie Faa!

Up wi' the chanter, lad, and gie's a blaw!  
For we'll step to the tune while we've feet intill oor shune,  
Tho' the bailies an' the provost be to sort us a'!

We've three bonnie bottles, but the third ane's toom,  
Gin the road ran whisky, it's mysel' wad soom!  
But we'll stan' while we can, an' be dancin' while we may,  
For there's twa we hae to finish, an' it's Hogmanay.

Geordie Faa! Geordie Faa!

There's an auld carle glow'rin' oot ahint yon wa',  
But we'll sune gar him loup to the pipin' till he coup,  
For we'll gie him just a drappie, an' he'll no say na!

My heid's dementit an' my feet's the same,  
When they'll no wark thegither it's a lang road hame,  
An' we've twa mile to traivel or it's mair like three,  
But I've got a grip o' Alick, an' he'd best grip me.

Geordie Faa! Geordie Faa!

The morn's near brakin' an' we'll need awa',  
Gin ye're aye blawin' strang, then we'll maybe get alang.  
An' the deevil tak' the laddie that's the first to fa'!

## THE HOWE O' THE MEARNS

**L**ADDIE, my lad, when ye gang at the tail o' the  
plough,  
An' the days draw in,  
When the burnin' yellow's awa' that was aince a-lowe  
On the braes o' whin,  
Div ye mind o' me that's deaved wi' the wearyfu' south  
An' its puir consairns,  
While the weepies fade on the knowes at the river's mouth  
In the Howe o' the Mearns?

There was nae twa lads frac the Grampians doon to the  
Tay  
That could best us twa;  
At bothie or dance, or the field on a fitba' day,  
We could sort them a';  
An' at coortin'-time, when the stars keeked doon on the  
glen,  
An' its theek o' fairns,  
It was you an' me got the pick o' the basket then  
In the Howe o' the Mearns.

London is fine, an' for ilk o' the lasses at hame  
There'll be saxty here,  
But the springtime comes an' the hairst—an' it's aye the  
same  
Through the changefu' year.  
Oh, a lad thinks lang o' hame ere he thinks his fill  
As his breid he airns—  
An' they're thrashin' noo at the white fairm up on the hil  
In the Howe o' the Mearns.

Gin I mind mysel' an' toil for the lave o' my days,  
While I've een to see,  
When I'm auld an' done wi' the fash o' their English ways,  
I'll come hame to dee;  
For the lad dreams aye o' the prize that the man'll get,  
But he lives an' lairns,



## VIOLET JACOB

An' it's far, far ayont him still—but it's farther yet  
To the Howe o' the Mearns.

Laddie, my lad, when the hair is white on yer pow,  
An' the wark's pit past,  
When yer hand's owre auld an' heavy to haud the plough  
I'll win hame at last.  
And we'll bide our time on the knowes whaur the broom  
stands braw,  
An' we played as bairns,  
Till the last lang gloamin' shall creep on us baith, an' fa'  
On the Howe o' the Mearns.

## CRAIGO WOODS

CRAIGO Woods, wi' the splash o' the cauld rain  
    beatin'  
    I' the back end o' the year,  
When the clouds hang laigh wi' the weicht o' their load o'  
    greetin',  
    And the autumn wind's asteer;  
Ye may stand like ghaists, ye may fa' i' the blast that's  
    cleft ye  
    To rot i' the chilly dew,  
But when will I mind on aucht since the day I left ye  
    Like I mind on you—on you?

Craig Woods, i' the licht o' September sleepin'  
    And the saft mist o' the morn,  
When the hairst climbs to yer feet, an' the sound o' reapin'  
    Comes up frae the stookit corn,  
And the braw reid puddock-stules are like jewels blinkin',  
    And the bramble happs ye baith,  
Oh, what do I see i' the lang nicht, lyin' an' thinkin',  
    As I see yer wraith—yer wraith?

There's a road to a far-aff land, an' the land is yonder  
    Whaur a' men's hopes are set;  
We dinna ken foo lang we maun hae to wander,  
    But we'll a' win to it yet;  
An' gin there's woods o' fir an' the licht atween them,  
    I winna speir its name,  
But I'll lay me doon by the puddock-stules when I've seen  
    them,  
    And I'll cry,—“I'm hame—I'm hame!”

## JOCK, TO THE FIRST ARMY

O RAB an' Dave an' rantin' Jim,  
The geans were turnin' reid  
When Scotland saw yer line grow dim,  
Wi' the pipers at its heid;  
Noo, i' yon warld ye dinna ken,  
Like strangers ye maun gang—  
*"We've sich a wale o' Angus men  
That we canna weary lang."*

An' little Wat—my brither Wat—  
Man, are ye aye the same?  
Or is yon sma' white hoose forgot,  
Doon by the strath at hame?  
An' div' ye mind foo aft we trod  
The Isla's banks before?—  
*"My place is wi' the Hosts o' God  
But I mind me o' Strathmore."*

It's deith comes skirling through the sky,  
Below there's naucht but pain,  
We canna see whaur deid men lie  
For the drivin' o' the rain;  
Ye a' hac passed frae fear an' doot,  
Ye're far frae airthly ill—  
*"We're near, we're here, my wee recruit,  
An' we fecht for Scotland still."*



# NEIL MUNRO

LAMENT FOR MACLEOD OF RAASAY—THE  
BELLS O' BANFF—LOCHABER NO MORE!  
—JOHN O' LORN—FINGAL'S WEEPING



## LAMENT FOR MACLEOD OF RAASAY

**A**LLAN Ian Og Macleod of Raasay,  
Treasure of mine, lies yonder dead in Loos,  
His body unadorned by Highland raiment,  
Trammelled, for glorious hours, in Saxon treads.  
Never man before of all his kindred  
Went so appalled to the burial knowe,  
But with the pleated tartan for his shrouding,  
The bonnet on his brow.

My grief! that Allan should depart so sadly,  
When no wild mountain pipe his bosom wrung,  
With no one of his race beside his shoulder,  
Who knew his history and spoke his tongue.  
Ah! lonely death and drear for darling Allan!  
Before his ghost had taken wings and gone,  
Loud would he cry in Gaelic to his gallants,  
"Children of storm, press on!"

Beside him, when he fell there in his beauty,  
Macleods of all the islands should have died;  
Brave hearts his English!—but they could not fathom  
To what old deeps the voice of Allan cried,  
When in that strange French countryside, war-battered,  
Far from the creeks of home and hills of heath,  
A boy, he kept the old tryst of his people  
With the dark girl Death.

O Allan Ian Og! O Allan aluinn!  
Sore is my heart remembering the past,  
And you of Raasay's ancient gentle children  
The farthest-wandered, kindest and last.  
It should have been the brave dead of the islands  
That heard ring o'er their tombs your battle-cry,  
To shake them from their sleep again, and quicken  
Peaks of Torridon and Skye!

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

Gone in the mist the brave Macleods of Raasay,  
Far furth from fortune, sundered from their lands,  
And now the last grey stone of Castle Raasay  
Lies desolate and levelled with the sands;  
But pluck the old isle from its roots deep planted  
Where tides cry coronach round the Hebrides,  
And it will bleed of the Macleods lamented,  
Their loves and memories!



## THE BELLS O' BANFF

**A**S I gaed down the water-side  
I heard a maiden sing,  
All in the lee-lone Sabbath morn,  
And the green glen answering,  
"No longer hosts encountering hosts  
Shall clouds of slain deplore,  
They hang the trumpet in the hall,  
And study war no more."

Dead men of ancient tumults lay  
In dust below her feet;  
Their spirits breathed to her but scents  
Of mint and the meadow-sweet;  
Singing her psalm, her bosom calm  
As the dappled sky above,  
She thought the world was dedicate  
For evermore to love!

O God! my heart was like to break,  
Hearing her guileless strain,  
For pipes screamed through the Highland hills,  
And swords were forth again;  
And little did the lassie ken  
Banff's battle bells were ringing;  
Her lad was in the gear of war  
While she was happy singing!

## LOCHABER NO MORE!

**F**AREWELL to Lochaber, farewell to the glen,  
No more will he wander Lochaber again.  
Lochaber no more! Lochaber no more!  
The lad will return to Lochaber no more!  
The trout will come back from the deeps of the sea,  
The bird from the wilderness back to the tree,  
Flowers to the mountain and tides to the shore,  
But he will return to Lochaber no more!

Oh, why should the hills last, that never were young,  
Unperishing stars in the heavens be hung;  
Be constant the seasons, undrying the stream,  
And he that was gallant be gone like a dream?  
Brave songs will be singing in isles of the West,  
But he will be silent who sang them the best;  
The dance will be waiting, the pipes will implore,  
But he will return to Lochaber no more!

Child of the forest! profound is thy sleep,  
The valley that loved thee awakes but to weep;  
When our fires are rekindled at dawn of the morn,  
Our griefs burn afresh, and our prayers are forlorn;  
The night falls disconsolate, bringing no peace,  
No hope for our dreams, for our sighs no release;  
In vain come the true hearts and look from the door,  
For thou wilt return to Lochaber no more!

## JOHN O' LORN

**M**Y plaid is on my shoulder and my boat is on the shore,  
And it's all bye wi' auld days and you;  
Here's a health and here's a heartbreak, for it's hame, my dear, no more,  
To the green glens, the fine glens we knew!

'Twas for the sake o' glory, but oh! wae upon the wars,  
That brought my father's son to sic a day;  
I'd rather be a craven wi' nor fame nor name nor scars,  
Than turn an exile's heel on Moidart Bay.

And you, in the daytime, you'll be here, and in the mirk,  
Wi' the kind heart, the open hand and free;  
And far awa' in foreign France, in town or camp or kirk,  
I'll be wondering if you keep a thought for me.

But nevermore the heather nor the bracken at my knees,  
I'm poor John o' Lorn, a brokèn man;  
For an auld Hielan' story I must sail the swinging seas,  
A chief without a castle or a clan.

My plaid is on my shoulder and my boat is on the shore,  
And it's all bye wi' auld days and you;  
Here's a health and here's a heartbreak, for it's hame, my dear, no more,  
To the green glens, the fine glens we knew!

## FINGAL'S WEEPING

**B**ECAUSE they were so brave and young  
Who now are sleeping,  
His old heart wrung, his harp unstrung,  
Fingal's a-weeping.

There's warble of waters at morning in Etive glen,  
And the mists are flying;  
Chuckle of Spring in the wood, on the moor, on the ben,  
No heed for their dying!  
So Fingal's weeping, the young brave sleeping,  
Fingal's weeping.

They'll be forgot in Time—forgot!  
Time that goes sweeping;  
The wars they fought remembered not,  
And Fingal's weeping.

Hearken for voices of sorrow for them in the forest den  
Where once they were rovers—  
Only the birds of the wild at their building again,  
Whispering of lovers!  
So Fingal's weeping, his old grief keeping,  
Fingal's weeping.

They should be mourned by the ocean wave  
Round lone isles creeping,  
But the laughing wave laments no grave,  
And Fingal's weeping.

Morven and Moidart, glad, gallant and gay in the sun,  
Rue naught departed;  
The moon and the stars shine out when the day is done,  
Cold, stony-hearted,  
And Fingal's weeping war's red reaping,  
Fingal's weeping!

# WILL. H. OGILVIE

THE SCOTCH FIR—THE KINGSHIP OF THE HILLS—  
FLODDEN HILL—TILL THE KING RETURNS—THE  
BROWN BURNS—A BORDER POET—THE BLADES OF  
HARDEN—A BORDERER



## THE SCOTCH FIR

**T**HIS is the tallest tree within my woods,  
Lean, rugged-stemmed, and of all branches bare  
Full thirty feet, with green plumes in the air  
And roots among the bracken. All his moods  
Are rough but kingly; whether, grand, he broods  
Above his full-leaved comrades in the glare  
Of summer, or in winter, still more fair,  
Nods princely time to the wind's interludes.

Beauty may claim the beeches, elm and oak  
Stir sentiment in England; but the fir  
Stands here for Scotland and the bleak bare North.  
Too tall to stoop to any servile yoke,  
Too strong of heart to more than lightly stir  
When the worst storm-winds of the world break forth.

## THE KINGSHIP OF THE HILLS

**B**ORN in the purple the red grouse cry;  
Born in the purple the whaups reply;  
Born in the purple the clouds are kings  
Sailing away on their snow-white wings.  
The eagle high on the ruby peak  
Has the scorn o' the vale in his curling beak;  
And every burn that goes dancing down  
Has a purple robe and a silver crown.

The lightnings flash like a jewel-band;  
The thunder rolls like a king's command;  
With a palace-roof of the windy stars  
Where God looks over His golden bars.  
Here, in the pride of all high-born things  
The red deer go with the gait of kings;  
And only a step from their cottage doors  
The rough hill-shepherds are emperors.



## FLODDEN HILL

WHEN the dusk draws home the cattle  
What knights in their trenches turn?  
What fires of the pride of battle  
Through the bars of their helmets burn?  
What steeds are the bridles biting?  
What hafts are the gauntlets fitting?  
What casques are the claymores splitting  
To toss to the hawk and hern?

When the moon is a-march in Heaven,  
When the beautiful woods are still,  
What trumpet-call is given?  
What troop rides over the hill?  
What horses come proudly neighing?  
What songs are the night-winds saying  
To the torn red pennons swaying  
A-dip to the tide of Till?

When the brown owls hoot in shadow,  
When the raiding foxes call,  
What King comes over the meadow  
To put to the touch his all?  
What blades in the moon are gleaming,  
What blackcock feathers are streaming  
Above those hosts of dreaming  
This flower of a land to fall?

Was there ever a trumpet calling?  
Was there ever a troop rode by?  
Was it only the dead leaves falling  
That wailed to a windy sky?  
Is there no grass red and sodden?  
No trampled field and trodden,  
Is it only a dream of Flodden  
Where silent the dead men lie?

## TILL THE KING RETURNS

**T**HE wild rose twines on the gateway there,  
The green weed grows and the bramble clings,  
Barring the road to thy hearth, Traquair,  
With the loyal hands of the earth's green things;  
The wind through the rusted iron sings,  
The sun on the self-sown tangle burns,  
But never a hoof on the roadway rings—  
The gate is shut till the King returns.

I had a lover gallant and fair—  
Ah! naught but sorrow the memory brings!—  
I opened my heart to him; everywhere  
He was my guest, and his right a king's;  
But lightly his love at the last took wings,  
Flying away with the hawks and hems,  
And a gate no more on its hinges swings—  
My heart is shut till my king returns.

# THE BROWN BURNS

*from "The Land we Love"*

THE brown burns of the Border,  
They hasten down the vale  
On shallows through the sunlight,  
In spates before the gale.  
Grey dawn and rosy sunset  
Lie mirrored in their breast,  
Who call us forth to labour  
And lead us home to rest.

They cool our knee-deep cattle,  
They turn our drowsy mills,  
They bring to us the music  
Of our blue eternal hills.  
They count our crumbling arches,  
They tell our lichened towers,  
And wake with soft insistence  
Some ancient pride of ours.

Sweet with the scent of heather,  
Clean from the clasp of peat,  
They dance to please our children,  
Against their rosy feet.  
They guide our youths and maidens  
When love has bid them roam;  
They lead our tired fathers  
Along the last road home.

For thought of whence they gather,  
For love of where they wend,  
For pride of flowers they cherish  
And fields that they befriend.  
When all sounds else are silent,  
When all songs else depart,  
The brown burns of the Border  
Shall sing within my heart.

## A BORDER POET

**T**HE green of God's earth  
Is the floor of the fane  
Where he worships the worth  
Of the sun and the rain.

The blue of God's sky  
Is the roof and the dome  
Of the store-house where lie  
The rich gems of his home.

Each vale as it dips,  
Each stream and its strand,  
Is a song to his lips  
And a harp to his hand.

Each hill, near and far,  
Holds the gleam of the lance  
Of an Armstrong or Kerr  
In the days of Romance.

And the bard of this land  
That was spoil to the strong  
Still shall raid with rash hand  
The wide Marches of Song.

# THE BLADES OF HARDEN

*from "Whaup o' the Rede"*

**H**O! for the blades of Harden!  
Ho! for the driven kye!  
The broken gate and the lances' hate,  
And a banner red on the sky!  
The rough road runs by the Carter;  
The white foam creams on the rein;  
Ho! for the blades of Harden!  
"There will be moonlight again."

The dark has heard them gather,  
The dawn has bowed them by,  
To the guard on the roof comes the drum of a hoof  
And the drone of a hoof's reply.  
There are more than birds on the hill to-night,  
And more than winds on the plain!  
The threat of the Scotts has filled the moss,  
"There will be moonlight again."

Ho! for the blades of Harden!  
Ho! for the ring of steel!  
The stolen steers of a hundred years  
Come home for a Kirkhope meal!  
The ride must risk its fortune,  
The raid must count its slain,  
The March must feed her ravens,  
"There will be moonlight again!"

Ho! for the blades of Harden!  
Ho! for the pikes that cross!  
Ho! for the king of lance and ling  
—A Scott on the Ettrick moss!  
The rough road runs by the Carter,  
The white foam creams on the rein;  
And aye for the blades of Harden  
"There will be moonlight again!"

## A BORDERER

**B**ROKEN keep and burning farm  
Taught his fathers strength of arm;  
Feud and fight from gate to gate  
Showed them how to nurse their hate.

Girth-deep moss and clinging mire  
Taught them patience in desire;  
Four-foot wall and lintel tough  
Taught them how to take rebuff.

Pikes that thrust and thrust again  
Steeled their hearts and made them men.

Thus he learned in lore of eld  
How the foremost trench is held.

White roads winding through the corn  
Point the farm where he was born;  
Elm trees arching it with shade  
Mark the garden where he played.

Here he came, one week of leave,  
With the new stripe on his sleeve,  
Trampling through the dust of June  
To some jingling soldier-tune.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here was lad as stout of thew  
As our Flodden ever knew;  
Here a heart that went to war,  
Clean as winds on Newton Tor.

Now with many more he lies,  
Youth's imperial sacrifice,  
Where the Border's patriot sons  
Broke against the Turkish guns.

Where above the Dardanelles,  
Crowned with Fame's own immortelles,  
Border spirit, staunch as steel,  
Holds the crest with brave M'Neile.

# T. S. CAIRNCROSS

GLENDARG — LANGHOLM — THE MARTYR  
GRAVES—TO J. B. SELKIRK—SUNSET—GREY  
GALLOWAY—A BORDER RUIN—THE MERLE  
IN THE MAY





## GLENDEARG

**G**AUNT, sequestered, blanched,  
Naked it stands: unforgetful,  
A star of old story.

Its red wistful grey with age,  
Its light a long shadow  
Of time in the shafts of the sun;  
And deep by the Elwyn,  
Where Carnea Crux passed over  
To the chapel of latest resting,  
Nothing but peace.

Hard by its ruins  
Swords of yore have been gleaming  
That dared, and feared no one;  
And over its quiet pastures  
Sang the march of the armies of Scotland.  
Ah! the red rain: where to-day sheep browse peaceful  
On the fells of its southland,  
All quiet now.

The Abbot is gone,  
With book, stole and vestment,  
His name but a bed of flowers;  
The Wizard who charmed him  
Sleeps in his Abbey tomb;  
Children of dreams; no more;  
And o'er its antiquity  
The runnel tinkles and chatters,  
A thread of gold.

Nothing to me—all its lost chapters,  
Yet have I part in it all.  
And since I am child  
Of the Borders and this Border glory,  
Shall I not honour  
The name and the fame  
In a garland of song!

## LANGHOLM

**I**T lies by the heather slopes,  
Where God spilt the wine of the moorland  
Brimming the beaker of hills. Lone it lies  
A rude outpost: challenging stars and dawn,  
And down from remoteness  
And the Balladland of the Forest  
The Pictish Esk trails glory,  
Rippling the quiet eaves  
With the gold of the sun.

Here casts the angler,  
Half-hid in shadow: his eyes  
Veiled with rapt contemplation,  
Where raider and reiver darted and harried.  
Those mild terrible eyes  
Came down from Flodden.

He hints and bends over the crystal waters  
In large content,  
The Roman Road all empty  
By death's stern sure outlawing,  
With here in great spaces of the wind and sunshine  
Life at the full!

O border shadow!  
A silhouette of silence and old years  
Ever abide: now the clang of the long day over,  
The little town shall fold itself to rest  
With through its dreams the chequered river gleaming  
In luminous peace!

## THE MARTYR GRAVES

**D**EAD, long dead,  
Irrevocably lost and dead  
Years and years ago.

And over their bones the hill winds pass  
In the trail of the weeping mists—  
The mists that go sheeted and grey on the moors,  
Like desolate spirits  
Of some dead day.

A voice calls  
From the hopeful, hurrying past  
In splendid faith about the bracken void,  
And old grey days of home,  
Faded and tawdry,  
Burst to life again,  
Transfigured with the glow of transient time,  
As some procession in an Eastern land  
Emerges to the radiance of the sun.  
And here to-day,  
On the vague Covenant moors  
And uplands, grey with death and mist of stones,  
Far away,  
From where the sickly generations go,  
I see the children of an early faith  
Pass in their fame.

In this fierce, sudden light  
The unforgotten dead,  
Joyous and glad, go free.

They are the men who fought for us and died:  
And yet who won.  
Singing they pass  
With their high pæan pulsing full of life—  
The unfulfilled;  
And all the martyr graves

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

Are glorious again  
As this full light falls on their sepulchres.  
Portioners of a little flesh and blood they were;  
And heirs of death;  
Yet kings of hope  
With the fierce fighter's joy,  
Battling for no vain faith that fades and dies  
Or hopeless loyalty,  
But for a kingdom more imperishable  
Than their renown.

But who will save  
The feeble, flickering race  
Upon whose martyr graves  
The shadow falls,  
And in whose fleeting day  
The hour is late?

## TO J. B. SELKIRK

**Y**OUR sun leans to the westward  
And mine climbs on towards noon,  
And the border hills are between us  
And fremyt is Selkirk Toun.

But once in the days of dreaming,  
When every rose was fair,  
I paused on the slopes of Selkirk  
And I know I saw you there.

You, who have written of Flodden  
And Yarrow and Ettrick Braes,  
And the pathos and love of the Border  
That shine in her eyes always.

And we both have drawn from the hillstream  
And cheered as the men went by,  
Booted and spurred, on the heather  
Who never came back to die.

And you shot the web with silver;  
And you have sung of the corn  
That never was harvested: never!  
And the brides that lay forlorn.

And your sun shall glow in the westward  
When mine is eclipsed at noon;  
But the clang of the clogs shall echo  
The ring of the single-soled shoon.

## SUNSET

**L**ONG ago,  
When the earth was a child full of laughter,  
Joy in her chariot of gold  
Glinted and passed. Scattered she there  
Lilies like pearls of the ocean,  
Roses ruddy as dawning,  
Heart's-ease, daffodils, pansies,  
Rosemary, rue.

The stream caught her silver laugh  
All a-ripple: birds on the wing her cry.  
Her girdle of peerless green  
Over the hills was shining,  
And over the purple heather  
The russet of her hair.

Peasants were gleaning  
In wells of the sun silhouetted; stole the blue  
Of her eye the cornflower: the poppies her dream  
And her rosary diamonds the dew;  
Yet ever she rode  
Right on to the silence,  
And out of her Horn of Plenty  
Fell songs of her bridal morning,  
Unto the great Going Down,  
And even till that dim light  
That falleth from the stars.

## GREY GALLOWAY

**I**LIE and dream about the waking light  
In this grey Galloway land so bleak and sere;  
And figures of another age appear  
From clan and hamlet girt with magic might;  
Wild men pass freely, haggard as at night  
The shadows move in mist: yet sign of fear  
Is not upon their faces; but austere  
And proud as kings they gather for the fight.

The years go by, and still both moor and mount  
Wear their memorials of a sterner day:  
Here age and death are held of no account,  
The moors have led the centuries astray,  
And deep life breaks in me a sudden fount,  
Silent as light in old grey Galloway.

## A BORDER RUIN

A WAY in lost brown reaches of the heather  
Cold, bare it stands, a bleak, primeval thing,  
Flaunting the summer skies and April weather,  
Where snipe rise and the lark forgets to sing,  
As one who slips to age and cannot die;  
A chapel worn with prostrate knees of prayer,  
A shadow of a memory long gone by,  
The ghost of dead days lingering, dreaming there.

It heard the Raiders cry and gave no sign,  
And looked not forth on mailed men shining past  
To Mary of the Lowes and Douce Cœur fine;  
And some more fortunate came here at last  
And laid them down in revel of June skies  
Unwitting; all their fight and wandering o'er;  
And time with coloured wings that careless flies  
Forgot them; they were spent and wearied sore.

The little windows like a quaint tourelle  
That glimmers in Lorraine or Languedoc  
Shine like dead eyes: the solitary cell  
That shuddered at the sound of battle-shock  
Is silent as the tombs beside its wall  
That silver birch festoon with mocking arms,  
And gone the tonsured anchorite whose call  
Rose heavenward in the din of death's alarms.

His world was peace; the white feet of the dawn  
Came to him where he knelt in jewelled day,  
Raising his orison: his orchard-lawn  
Still untemplated where lithe deer play:  
Of old the weary shadow of his life  
Fell over, and his broken heart of woe  
Gave back in glittering fragments all the strife  
As once death lit the face of Mirabeau.

The tiny spring threads trickling in the sun  
A spray of diamonds, and in vacant years



## T. S. CAIRNCROSS

The blackbird comes and timid redbreasts run,  
Ah me, a scanty living, for none hears  
The ploughshare cleave deep furrow in the spring,  
Lush yellow breadths of corn are all unknown,  
The birds that come are only on the wing,  
The Hermit ploughs a surer furrow lone.

For he has peopled this far hermitage  
With meditative shadows of the soul  
And men that live: no tempest shall assuage  
Their splendour, and no tide of time shall roll  
To obliterate their foot-prints from of yore,  
Or cleave their ranks or break their going-by,  
For they were men of prophecy, with store  
Of the world's best and greatest in their cry.

His eyes were fair, he had them from sea-kings:  
Dane, Northman, Angle, all looked forth and cried  
Like faces at the lattice; august things  
Of Venerable Bede found song and plied  
Their wings even in that stifled day of cloud,  
Seeking the zenith sun and clearer air,  
For they were for the noon-day and were bowed  
At morning twilight with their hope a prayer.

No decorated proverb trimmed his sin  
In a pathetic folly; no disguise  
Of learning wrapped him round and bound him in:  
His heart was ample and his brain was wise;  
Haply he lit on God, and groping found  
Him all his need: he flung his proverbs out  
To all the windy schools, and on the ground  
Slept like Aurelius in the careless rout.

And no man harmed him, for he lived on high  
Like the rare bird that keeps a lowly nest

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

Taking the heavens; and his arch of sky  
Was rounded by the stars beyond the west  
And flaming sundown; and the moors were lit  
With majesty and music in his dreams;  
The angels spread his board, his bread was fit  
And sweet to taste, his wine glanced in the streams.

The little crucifix is hanging still  
Beside the altar as if Rubens here  
Had limned its sorrow and from Calvary Hill  
Had traced the lines in blood with many a tear:  
And many an eye has seen it. Here, perchance,  
Knelt a rich Milton of an elder time,  
Or from his eyes looked Wordsworth with keen glance  
And beatific vision of high clime.

I see it all, though all is centuries gone,  
The rubble stands a crude religious joy,  
And nothing is of all that rose and shone  
On that dark day, and nothing can destroy  
The framework: or the thought that built so deep  
And soared so high and carved so chaste and pure,  
Chiselling its fancy like a thing in sleep  
Set free from fetters of the low life sure.

For this my day is flushed and out of breath,  
Seeking strange treasure in the crowded land,  
And has forgot the moors and life and death,  
And the still sanctuary that clasps a hand  
In brotherhood with all the saints of God,  
Out of the shadows of a silent home;  
And I who weary of the brown path broad  
Find rest beside the ruins when I roam.

## THE MERLE IN THE MAY

**M**INE is a tranquil garden-plot  
Full quaintly set apart from care;  
Acacia and forget-me-not  
And lawn and boxwood linger there;  
And apple-bloom and silver birch  
Are nodding tremulous by the way,  
But fairest in the falling mirk  
Is when the merle sings in the may.

All morning in a shower of pearl  
And sunlight, like a golden rain  
His notes fall; amethyst and beryl  
He scatters in his regal train,  
And on the beech he sits a king,  
All song his kingdom, and when day  
Sinks in the west, an idle thing,  
He sings a-dallying in the may.

Where sparkling footlights feed the stage,  
I, too, have listened white with joy,  
Taking the gift, but carping age  
Hath dulled the fine gold with alloy,  
And made me weary of it all,  
The pain, the tears, the trick, the play;  
And I have longed to hear the call  
The merle makes singing in the may.

All the glad innocence of hope  
Unfestered with the weight of things,  
Rises and shines; the velvet slope  
Grows radiant where he peerless sings;  
The unintelligible strife  
Dissolves superb before his ray,  
And leaves him singing of the life  
He loves felicitous in the may.

The jewelled word all carved and quaint,  
The antique phrase so richly set,

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

Are glittering as the light grows faint  
    In priceless vantage of vignette;  
And all my heart is hung with joy  
    And fringed with music; who shall say  
What far-off memories I prolong  
    Where thou, merle, singest in the may?

And no man heeds thee. All are bent  
    On the world's pleasure or its task;  
They come, they go, thy song is lent  
    A little moment; yet all ask  
Nothing of thee; the ripples flow  
    In bead and eddy, die away;  
O vacant souls that never know  
    What hour the merle sings in the may

Be mine to hear and mine to live,  
    And mine to worship, ere the sun  
Turneth to darkness, and above  
    The stars proclaim that day is done;  
For then, methinks, I have not passed  
    To fruitless nothing all astray,  
If on my failure at the last  
    The merle sings golden in the may.

# C. M. GRIEVE

LA BELLE TERRE SANS MERCI—ALLEGIANCE  
—MOUNTAIN MEASURE—TO A FRENCH GIRL  
FRIEND—BEYOND EXILE—TO M. G.



## LA BELLE TERRE SANS MERCI\*

**H**ATCHMENTS of houses multitudinous  
Shine starry-white, and Eden-green  
Glimmer the cypress groves innumeros  
That sit between,  
And many a slender spire  
Of silver fire  
Shoots heavenward. Over the foothills run  
The tides of stone and leaf in terraces  
Full on the toppling towers of Yedi-Coule  
Worn by th' imponderable sun  
To shadows dun,  
One scarce distinguishes  
From lion-coloured shapes of far great peaks,  
Where streams the East in many a sapphire pool  
And silence speaks—  
Speaks with the voice of War,  
Thundering afar!

The broad seas are a mesh of quivering gold  
Full of a haul miraculous,  
Of sailing ships and warships bold  
And fruit-boats odorous.  
See where Olympus sounding soars  
Like Heaven's walls!—  
Where dark the Vardar pours  
And sorrow calls—  
And all the blue-grey hills of Thessaly  
Stand to the sea.  
High in the throbbing skies  
Twinkles an aeroplane  
Dim as an early star,  
Flashes and fades afar,  
Swims into sight again,  
And swoops and springs enormous in our eyes!

\* Salonika.

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

And when night falls—Psathoura's gleam  
And pyramidal Athos starred,  
And Lemnos sleeping there  
And Mitylene dim in dream!  
The young moon swings up slim and fair  
And all the bay is silver barred—  
But now the sleeping soldiers are  
In Cornwall or in London Town  
Or Donegal afar,  
Or where the Gaelic hills look down  
On Gaelic villages,  
Heedless that still the trembling breeze  
Murmurs with every breath  
That some one perisheth!

By every silver minaret  
In emerald cypress set,  
By the incomparable bay  
Whereby the city stands,  
By all the memoried battlements  
That still the centuried storms defy  
And lift into the equal sky  
A mighty monument to Time  
Unbroken yet.  
And by the incommemorate hands  
That shaped them so, but long to dust returned,  
While still the sunlight burns like wine  
Where their strong faith is urned;  
By all the fire in Eastern eyes,  
By all the light in Eastern skies,  
By colour and the coloured breeze,  
By music and the choring seas,  
By sorrow and the endless graves,  
By life and all the human waves,  
I deemed the scene miraculously fair  
With glory golden in the air,



## C. M. GRIEVE

And blessed the fate that gave my eyes  
To light on Paradise.

O Siren of the wrecking shores,  
O Mirage of the desert lands,  
Mother of whores  
With leprous hands—  
“Unclean!—Unclean!”  
O prostituted skies,  
Worthy of Paradise,  
O luring hills whose glory is a lie,  
The calm crystalline light that on Olympus lies  
The alabaster is of Death embalmed,  
A lantern for the damned  
To light their orgies by!

Death gives the ball  
And sets the pace withal.  
Syphilis in silver hides  
Her running wounds and rotting bones.  
Fever is clothed in gold.  
Gaily-caparisoned War rides  
And on the pointed stones  
The dervish Dysentery whirls  
Attenuate,  
While all in pearls  
And gleaming rubies hung,  
She who devours her young  
Insatiate!

By all the apple cheeks have here been blanched,  
By all the shining eyes have here been dimmed,  
By all the wounds unstanched,  
By all the dead unhymned,  
By every broken heart  
And every ruined mind—  
The eyes are opened that were blind,  
And know thee for the murderess thou art!

# ALLEGIANCE

*written on the Mediterranean*

“THE ancient chorus of the rich blue flood,  
The mystic sundance of the Middle Seas,  
What have you in your heart, Scots Borderman,  
Prithee, that can compare with these?”

“A brown stream chunners in my heart always.  
I know slim waters that the sun makes dance  
With splendid subtlety and suppleness,  
And many a green and golden glance.”

“See by the Spanish and the Afric coasts,  
The sailing vessels go with precious freight,  
Of silk and costly oil and coloured fruit,  
And treasures of the antique great!”

“I see: but in my treasure-chest I have  
Chimes of the red bell-heather, green fir-fans,  
And moorland mysteries and mountain hopes  
That are no other man’s.

Praise give I freely to the mighty Queen  
Who passes now in splendour and in state,  
But ah!—my heart is hers whose shy, light eyes  
And small, swift smile elate

Sealed me the servant of a cause forlorn,  
Whose dream and whose desire I cannot tell,  
Where timeless silence in the far blue hills  
Hangs like a ready bell!”

# MOUNTAIN MEASURE

LES HAUTES-PYRENEES,  
*June 1919.*

**A**ND now Aldebaran in the keen dawn dies,  
Vega and Althair from the kindling zenith pass,  
The valley mists  
Blush and dislimn  
And ancient peaks like fabulous statues stand,  
Shining like roses and athrill with song,  
Where morning burns them with apotheosis.

Breastplate of Judgment, here  
The planes of man-wrought fields  
The sapphire and the agate are,  
Jasper and beryl, and their glory shines  
Like living rainbows hung about  
Th' imponderable mystery of the graven world!

The barrier vast and inoppugnable,  
Ordnained to give  
Through all the guessless course of time  
Difference to man,—  
To set 'twixt eye and equal eye  
Commensurate spaces as 'twixt star and star,  
Convert like blood  
To currents that contend incessantly,  
And sever tongue and tongue in pentecosts perpetual,—

Lifts sheerly in the staring light  
To the unknowledgeable skies  
Bastions of ivory and jet,  
Vivid with ice and black with antique fire,  
That have withstood the whirling suns and storms  
Of countless centuries  
Whereunto they were vibrant cymbals once,

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

Instant with black and scarlet chords,  
Frenzying the stars.

And all man's thoughts are but as winds  
That in the valleys still  
Spin gravel!

# TO A FRENCH GIRL FRIEND

CIRQUE DE GAVARNIE,  
LES HAUTES-PYRENEES,  
*June 1919.*

**Y**OU named the mountains in your eager way,  
Singling each cloud-bound peak along the chain,  
As if you called them and they came to you  
And knew your hand upon their heads again,  
And I, the stranger, who had been afraid,  
Was taken into friendship too.

And in the unfamiliar fields you lifted up  
The blue face of a flower, and then the red,  
And I, who else had passed with lonely eyes,  
Saw sudden welcome through the grasses spread,  
Returning gaily between blade and blade  
Greetings that glittered starrywise!

## BEYOND EXILE

**P**RAISE God that still my feet can find  
In distant lands the old hill-road,  
And tread always no alien clay  
But their familiar sod.

And all the ocean's broad estate  
Be but a gleaming band to me  
That slips between the bending fields  
To find no foreign sea.

No stranger's roof-tree covers me,  
Albeit I travel far and wide,  
And sundering leagues but closer bind  
Me to my darling's side.

And if I pass the utmost bourne  
Why, then, I shall be home again—  
The quick step at the quiet door,  
The gay eyes at the pane!

SALONIKA,  
1916.

TO M. G.

W HETHER you are fairy or flesh  
I may now know never.  
A shimmer of rose in my eyes  
And a song in my ears for ever,  
You and the haze of my dreams  
I cannot dis sever.

With a rattle and whirl of drums  
You carry the heart of me,  
Or lure me with elfin pipes  
The ends of the world to see,—  
In batlight and noonday blaze  
My mistress and mystery!





# JOSEPH LEE

GERMAN PRISONERS—THE GREEN GRASS—THE  
BROKEN HEART—THE PENITENT—THE WHITE-  
WASHIN' O' ROBBIE BURNS—THE BURIAL O' THE  
BAIRN—THE DRUM



## GERMAN PRISONERS

*from "Workaday Warriors"*

WHEN first I saw you in the curious street,  
Like some platoon of soldier ghosts in grey,  
My mad impulse was all to smite and slay,  
To spit upon you—tread you 'neath my feet.  
But when I saw how each sad soul did greet  
My gaze with no sign of defiant frown,  
How from tired eyes looked spirits broken down,  
How each face showed the pale flag of defeat,  
And doubt, despair, and disillusionment,  
And how were grievous wounds on many a head,  
And on your garb red-faced was other red;  
And how you stooped as men whose strength was spent,  
I knew that we had suffered each as other,  
And could have grasped your hand and cried, "My brother."

# THE GREEN GRASS

*from "Ballads of Battle"*

**T**HE dead spake together last night,  
And one to the other said:  
"Why are we dead?"

They turned them face to face about  
In the place where they were laid:  
"Why are we dead?"

"This is the sweet, sweet month o' May,  
And the grass is green o'erhead—  
Why are we dead?"

"The grass grows green on the long, long tracks  
That I shall never tread—  
Why are we dead?"

"The lamp shines like the glow-worm spark,  
From the bield where I was bred—  
Why am I dead?"

The other spake: "I've wife and weans,  
Yet I lie in this waesome bed—  
Why am I dead?"

"Oh, I hae wife and weans at hame,  
And they clamour loud for bread—  
Why am I dead?"

Quoth the first: "I have a sweet, sweet heart,  
And this night we should hae wed—  
Why am I dead?"

"And I can see another man  
Will mate her in my stead,  
Now I am dead."

They turned them back to back about  
In the grave where they were laid:—  
"Why are we dead?"

## JOSEPH LEE

“ I mind o’ a field, a foughten field,  
Where the bluid ran routh and red—  
Now I am dead.”

“ I mind o’ a field, a stricken field,  
And a waeful wound that bled—  
Now I am dead.”

They turned them on their backs again,  
As when their souls had sped,  
And nothing further said.

. . . . .  
The dead spake together last night,  
And each to the other said,  
“ *Why are we dead?*”

# THE BROKEN HEART

*from "Ballads of Battle"*

I FOUND a silver sixpence,  
A sixpence, a sixpence,  
I found a silver sixpence,  
And I break it in twa;  
I gied it till a sodger,  
A sodger, a sodger,  
I gied it till a sodger,  
Before he gaed awa'.

I have a heart that's broken,  
That's broken, that's broken;  
I bear a heart that's broken,  
That's broken in twa—  
For I gied it till a sodger,  
A sodger, a sodger,  
I gied it till a sodger,  
Before he gaed awa'!

# THE PENITENT

*from "Ballads of Battle"*

**A**S I lay in the trenches at Noove Chapelle,  
Where the big guns barked like the hounds o' Hell,  
Sez I to mysel', sez I to mysel':—

Billy, me boy, here's the end o' you—  
But if, by good luck, ye should chance to slip thro',  
Ye maun bid all yer evil companions adieu;  
Keep the Lord's ten Commands—and Lord Kitchener's  
two—  
Sez I to mysel'—at Noove Chapelle.

No more women, and no more wine,  
No more hedgin' to get down the line,  
No more hoggin' around like a swine,  
After Noove Chapelle—sez I to mysel'.

But only the good God in Heaven knows  
The wayward way that a soldier goes,  
And He must ha' left me to walk by mysel'—  
For three times I've fell, since Noove Chapelle.

Once at Bethune and twice at Estaires,  
The divil gripped hould o' me unawares—  
Yet often and often I've prayed me prayers,  
Since I prayed by mysel', at Noove Chapelle.

Well the Lord above, who fashioned the French,  
May bethink how bewitchin' is wine and a wench  
To a chap that's been tied for three weeks to a trench,  
Around Noove Chapelle—that black bordero' Hell.

And me throat was dry and the night was damp,  
And the rum was raw—and red was the lamp!—  
And—Billy, me boy, ye'r a bit o' a scamp,  
That's the truth to tell—tho' I sez it mysel'.

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

What's worritin' me isn't fear that they'll miss  
Me out o' the ranks in the realms o' bliss;  
It's no hope o' Heaven, nor horror o' Hell,  
But just breakin' the promise, 'twixt God and mysel',  
    Made at Noove Chapelle.

Well, there's always a way that is open to men  
When they gets the knock-out—that's get up again;  
And sure now, ould Satan ain't yet counted ten!  
I'm game for another good bout wi' mysel'—  
    As at Noove Chapelle.



# THE WHITE-WASHIN' O' ROBBIE BURNS

*from "Tales o' our Town"*

**Y**ESTREEN I sauntered round the Square,  
The statues four were standing there—  
Ye ken them weel—  
Kinloch, Carmichael, and the Queen,  
And Rab (wi's big, uplifted een),  
In bronze—by Steele!

Wi' parted lips, but cold and dumb,  
He sits amid the city's hum,  
Aside the street;  
Yet oft we notice, as we pass,  
The modest daisy in the grass  
Spring at his feet.

And nigh, the fairy fountain, leaping,  
Mounting and murmuring, and weeping,  
Sings in our ears,  
Like Lugar low, or bonnie Doon—  
Perchance the same old, sad, sweet tune  
The poet hears.

But yesterday—I stood and gazed  
Upon the monument amazed  
At what I saw:  
For three loons, arm'd wi' brush an' mop,  
And soda, scouge, and guid saft soap,  
Scrubbit awa'!

Ane wi' his tongue hung frae his jaw,  
And wi' a dish-clout in his paw,  
Rubb'd at the scroll,  
As aff the schlate he wish't to clean  
A'thing that might be thought obscene  
Or ower droll!

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

Ane wi' a red and raggit shred  
Was dustin' doon that noble head—  
    That head of gold;  
Ane washed—what is't the scribblers say?—  
Ane washed the Poet's "feet of clay"—  
    O critics cold!  
Wad they but mind that he—as they—  
    Was made frae mold!

His faults? His sins? Who is't will cry—  
"This man walk'd straight, this went awry,"  
    And cast the stone?  
The Potter fashioning the clay,  
Of fair or foul 'tis He can say—  
    And He alone.

Religions of a thousand rules,  
And Churchman's creed, and scheme of schools  
    Of ponderous plan!  
His but the free unfetter'd mind—  
His creed was only to be kind  
    To mouse or man!

Behold me ower the railing leanin'  
To watch this whimsical spring-cleanin'  
    O' our great poet;  
Thocht I, "Man, Rab, this is a ploy  
That ye wad unco weel enjoy  
    Could ye but know it!"

Just then in's een gaed sowp o' soap—  
I saw them shut—I saw them ope—  
    And syne his mouth—  
"It weel may be, lads, that I'm dry,  
But put na liquor in my eye  
    To quench my drouth!

"Look! Ower yonder's an hotel—  
Oh ay, there's water i' the well

## JOSEPH LEE

And in your pail;  
But backward dae I flee in fancy  
To thae wild nichts whan Poussie Nancy  
Sell't reamin' ale!"

I thocht to see the men look baffled,  
Or even tum'le aff their scaffold,  
But feint a bit!  
As tho' they neither heard nor saw,  
They dusted, dighted, douched awa'  
Frae head to fit.

Rab turned to me, "What's a' this fash?  
Ah! but I see—aince mair—whitewash!"  
Said he, richt sadly.  
"Weel, weel, wi' a' the steer an' skurry,  
They've made frae Henley back to Currie  
I'se need it badly."

Thocht I, "Whan buried an' forgotten  
Lie a' the critics e'er begotten,  
Thou shalt not die;  
Tho' on thy head the dust of ages,  
Nae dust shall gather on thy pages"—  
Rab heaved a sigh.

Said he, "In sunshine smile I'd bask'd,  
But when for only bread I asked—  
Behold a stone!  
I knew the quick averted glance,  
The upcurl'd lip, the look askance—  
I walked alone.

"But aye repaid them sneer for sneer—  
Ourselves alone can harm us here—  
Ah, there's the rub!  
My heart beat high, my blood leap'd wild,  
And oft my straying feet were filed  
In drift and dub.

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

“Oh, what avails the years we see—  
Or thirty-seven or seventy-three,  
    Whan ends the story?  
Some dee as tho' they'd never been livin'—  
Too cauld for Hell, too hot for Heaven,  
    Or Purgatory!

“The Power alone that formed me—man—  
Can say how far I marred the plan,  
    But d'ye ken?  
Mayhap had I ne'er gaen awrong  
Not half sae sure had sped my song  
    'Mang sinfu' men.”

(Quoth I, “Amen!”)

Rab glanced around, “It wad appear  
Ye've progressed some this hundert year—  
    The world seems waking,  
But still are fearsome foes for fighting,  
Still are there wrongs that wait for righting,  
    Man's i' the making.

“Still curb'd by clerics, courtiers, kings;  
Still Dives unto Lazarus flings  
    A dole of crumbs;  
But yet that day of which I spake  
Draws nearer—Thou may see it break!  
    It comes! It comes!

“Farewell!” Rab nothing further said,  
But raised to heaven once more his head—  
    It might hae seem'd—  
But for that twinkle o' his e'e,  
But for the words he held wi' me,  
But that the hour was only three!—  
    That I had dream'd!

[Perhaps I owe something in the nature of an apology to the three respectable and capable-looking workmen whom I found at work on the Burns Statue, for the various liberties I have taken with them.]

# THE BURIAL O' THE BAIRN

hitherto unpublished

*“ . . . a little grave,  
A little, little grave, an obscure grave.”*

**H**E sat within the dingy room,  
And heard the parson pray;  
But his heavy leaden eyes were fixed  
On the coffin lid alway.

He sat within the dreary room,  
The while the parson read  
“The Resurrection and the Life”—  
He only mourned the dead.

“Where is thy Victory, O Grave?  
O Death, where is thy Sting?”—  
Within his heart he felt the smart  
Of the cruel barbèd thing.

“Behold thy daughter is not dead!  
Behold thy brother sleeps!”  
His heavy, hungry, leaden eyes  
On the coffin lid he keeps.

His heavy leaden eyes are fixed  
Upon the coffin lid,  
And on the fair frail form beneath  
Refuses to be hid.

He hears the beat of horses' hoofs,  
The grind of carriage wheels;  
His spirit stands rebellious up  
The while his body kneels.

He clasps the coffin in his arms,  
And bears it to the door;  
*Its* head rests on his bowed shoulder  
As hers so oft before!

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

He clasps the coffin in his arms,  
And bears it down the stair,  
He seems to feel, beneath the deal,  
Caressings of her hair!

He bears it through the narrow close,  
Where waits the expectant throng,  
And "Here *it* comes," the children cry,  
That she had played among.

He crouches in the mourning coach,  
The coffin on his knees,  
And gazes through the sombre lid  
To what beneath he sees.

He crouches in the mourning car,  
The coffin in his arm,  
As he would save that precious load  
From that last deadly harm.

He crouches in the mourning coach,  
He and his brother Ned,  
And the two boys who sit ashamed  
That tears they cannot shed.

For that they take a strange delight  
As through the streets they ride,  
In gazing on the curious world  
That passes by outside.

And Uncle Ned attempts to talk,  
Even tries a humble jest,  
And longing feels the well-loved pipe  
That lies within his vest.

The father sits within the coach,  
The coffin on his knees,  
And gazes through the sombre lid  
To what beneath he sees.

## JOSEPH LEE

And all the while the coach rolls on  
Relentlessly as fate;  
Until they reach the burying-place,  
And turn in by the gate.

He hears the grinding, girding wheel  
Upon the gravel path.  
It stops.—The time has come to yield  
The little that he hath.

He clasps the coffin in his arms  
And bears it to the place;  
He seems to feel upon his cheek  
The softness of her face.

He bears it where the red soil shows  
The gulf within the ground;  
The heavy-booted men stand back,  
The mourners stand around.

One at the head, one at the foot,  
And one at either side,  
And in the midst of them is set  
The little one that died.

“The Lord gave, and the Lord has ta'en,  
Now blessed be the Lord”;  
They lower in that snow-white life,  
Each with a snow-white cord.

A little way it goeth down,  
This bed where she shall sleep,  
And yet to him who stands above  
It seems abysmal deep.

The earth falls on the coffin lid  
Like to a summer rain,  
And even so it smites his heart  
To loneliness and pain.

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

The earth drops on the coffin lid  
Like to a thunder show'r;  
A dead heart and a living heart  
Are buried in that hour.

And now these heavy-booted men  
A fitting grave have made,  
They tread it gently with their feet  
And tap it with their spade.  
"Sure, but she was a little one,"  
One to the other said.

\* \* \* \* \*

The rain comes down upon the earth,  
The clouds above are whirled,  
Below a little dust goes back  
To the dust of all the world.



# THE DRUM

*from "Ballads of Battle"*

*'Come to me and I will give you flesh.'*—OLD PIBROCHADH

COME!  
Says the drum;  
Though graves be hollow,  
Yet follow, follow:

Come!  
Says the drum.

Life!  
Shrills the fife,  
Is in strife—  
Leave love and wife:

Come!  
Says the drum.

Ripe!  
Screams the pipe,  
Is the field—  
Swords and not sickles wield:

Come!  
Says the drum.

The drum  
Says, Come!  
Though graves be hollow,  
Yet, follow, follow:

Come!  
Says the drum.



# JOHN FERGUSON

ON HEARING CHOPIN'S "MARCHE FUNÈBRE"—TO DAVID  
GRAY—ON A CHORUS-GIRL—"RESTING"—MISERRIMA—  
ON A GYMNASTIC CONTORTIONIST—ON A LOW COMEDIAN  
—SMITH: BANK ACCOUNTANT—ON A REPRESENTATION  
OF "OTHELLO"—"THYREA": SONNET—"THYREA": SON-  
NET—"THYREA": "ON TOUR"



# ON HEARING CHOPIN'S "MARCHE FUNÈBRE"

VLADIMIR DE PACHMANN

**T**HE pulse of Grief beats through these quivering  
strains,

And the all-conscious keys are fraught with drear  
And wizard echoes from those shadow-plains

Where mortals journey, and return not here:

Chopin! What dole was at thy spirit's core,

What sainted sorrow, what enthroned despair,

What cup of woe was emptied of its store

When thou didst thus thy painèd soul lay bare?

The marbles sleep. And yet those strains divine

Haunt me, and fill me with a vague unrest;

Somewhat of sadness lingers in my breast,

Somewhat of mist still dims my tearless eyne:

O God! This wild and wayward spirit of mine

A little space hath been supremely blest.

# TO DAVID GRAY

AUTHOR OF "THE LUGGIE"

**O**THERS have poured forth loftier strains than thine,  
And Fame has placed her laurels on their brow :  
Not Shakespeare's vision, Shelley's flush of wine,  
Nor Milton's organ-voice thou hadst; but thou  
Didst sob thy soul in sorrow through the years,  
And swan-like, sang'st thyself to Lethe's wave;  
And obstinate Fame, that spurned thy passionate tears,  
Reluctant laid her wreath upon thy grave.

But while the fern-fringed Luggie flows along,  
And Bothlin sings herself into the sea;  
While lovers stray Glenconner's glooms among,  
And storied Night holds Merkland's dreams in fee,  
Fragrant thy memory, and thy star shall be  
Luminous among the lesser orbs of song.

## ON A CHORUS-GIRL

WITH half a score of singing girls she swings  
Down the bright stage; sustains a rigid pose,  
Toe-dances till her carmine beauty glows,  
Then trips into the darkness of the wings:  
Changes her dress; and while some "starlet" sings,  
Into the footlights' glare again she goes,  
Creeps on all fours, and dances on her toes . . .  
Her rouged companions do the self-same things.

Twice nightly thus, for thirty bob a week!  
No high Ambition swells her kindly heart,  
No splendid rôle she craves, no brainy part,  
Yet Hope burns where those spangly sequins shine;  
Hope that to her may come the chance to speak—  
The envied chance to speak the envied line.

## “RESTING”

I MET her at the top of Catherine Street,  
A pale-faced girl in her pathetic “best,”  
She told me how dead weary was her quest,  
And how the “Actors’ Mile” was each day’s beat  
From ten to five. She had been “out” since May,  
Her “panto” savings now were well-nigh spent  
On callous agents and the weekly rent  
Of her third-floor “combined” out Brixton way.

She was a “small-part woman” in the “Smalls,”  
In Town she “supered” and would just “walk on,”  
A rouged and spangled creature gaily dressed—  
Now “shops” were scarce at theatres and halls,  
And she was “resting,” sore dismayed and lone—  
The resting that has not the gift of rest.



# MISERRIMA

HAEC IN TERRA MISERRIMA COELUM INIIT

**A** FAIR-HAIRED harlot on a city street—  
Her purple sunshade smutched with sludge and  
rain,

Her coloured dress all draggled at the train,  
And worn the shoes upon her tired feet—  
I saw her creep from out the policeman's beat,  
And, shunning sight, slink down a choking lane;  
Starveling she looked, as if the hunger-pain  
Had made her tawdry wretchedness complete.

Now she is dead, poor Child; and now to-night—  
Forgotten pious spleen and cruel jest,  
The scornful brow, Propriety's cold stare—  
I see her sleeping in the land of light,  
Soft-pillowed on the Magdalene's breast,  
And no Reproach nor any pain is there.

## ON A GYMNASTIC CONTORTIONIST

**H**E makes his entrance on his hands and knees,  
His pliant backbone like Diana's bow,  
And snake-like glistening in the limelight's glow,  
He coils his tinselled limbs by slow degrees;  
Turning a "cartwheel," he assumes with ease  
A froggish shape, and bounces to and fro,  
Hand-climbs a ladder, and concludes his show  
With sinuous twistings on a high trapeze.

Twice every evening for his scanty "screw"  
He coils his limbs and stretches tendon and thew,  
And climbs the ladder rung by difficult rung;  
No proud theatric crown he strives to gain,  
Content and happy could he but remain  
For ever lithe, if not for ever young.

## ON A LOW COMEDIAN

**T**HE index changes; up his number goes;  
The lights are lowered and the "rag" divides;  
In motley costume from the wings he strides,  
With blue and scarlet face and luminous nose;  
He hobbles round, strikes an eccentric pose,  
Leans on his stick and croaks a few "asides,"  
Then sings a song about his former brides,  
A jingle of his matrimonial woes.

His "biz." and "cackle" done he gets a "round,"  
Balloons a bit and exits in a bound,  
The tickled gods chorus his song the while. . . .  
And from His holy house beyond the skies  
Methinks the Christ looks down with loving eyes  
Whene'er He sees His toil-worn children smile.

# SMITH—BANK ACCOUNTANT

R.I.P.

**P**OOR Smith! He taught me how to write the "State,"  
And post the Ledger; and with sedulous care  
He led me step by step, and eke would share  
My clerkly sorrows at each change of rate;  
His kindly censure when I came in late,  
His lucid answer to each "Please explain,"  
I seem to hear and read; and once again  
I stand beside him at the office gate.

So farewell, Smith. The Cash is put away,  
The Ledger balanced and the "State" surveyed,  
And all the wrong endorsements guaranteed.  
From dusty desk-work is his spirit freed,  
And in Head Office he appears to-day  
Before The Chief Inspector undismayed.

ON A REPRESENTATION OF  
"OTHELLO"

ACT III. SCENE III.

**T**HE intrigue has triumphed; it is too, too late;  
The proofs are vouched for. Now I see thee stand  
Like an august Colossus, dark and grand,  
Fronting the onset of disastrous fate:  
Swells thy black bosom with its desperate freight,  
Lean the ripe fruits of vengeance toward thy hand,  
Now must thou pluck;—dead the fond schemes love  
planned,  
And all that flower-soft love is tyrannous hate.

Now is the chainèd beast in man set free,  
Thine now the thirst blood only may assuage;  
In purple of passion—fury of frenzied rage,  
O thou deluded Moor, I bow to thee  
Who, in this hour of culminant agony,  
Gasp'st inarticulate upon the stage.

## FROM "THYREA"

*a Sonnet Sequence from a Sanatorium\**

### I

**H**E caught a chill in Leicester, he came here;—  
He came here with his little store of gold,  
To this grim dwelling, bare, and clean, and cold,  
Where life joins hands with death, and hope with fear:  
He told us how in Leicester's city drear,  
On coughing slightly, down his garments rolled  
'The warm and scarlet flood; and oft he told  
How softly he would tread from year to year.

His wife came for him, and he left to-day  
Because his little store of gold was done;  
My God! I knew not gold and life were one  
Till he shook hands with us and went away:  
His limbs all fever-thinned, and hope all gone—  
O Christ in Heaven, how he longed to stay!

\* First published in 1918 (with a Foreword by W. L. Courtney, LL.D.), "Thyrea" has since run into more editions than any other volume of distinguished modern verse.

## FROM "THYREA"

*a Sonnet Sequence from a Sanatorium*

### II

**T**HERE was a shuffling of strange feet last night  
Along the naked corridor of stone;  
Dull creakings, and much talk in undertone  
In the next room to mine: Death's chill and blight  
Lay on my brother, who, though screened from sight,  
Was by his ominous cough endeared and known;  
And I, all wakeful in my chamber lone,  
Quailed in the deathful dark, and longed for light.

O God, that some should stumble by the way!  
They do not like us dying here, we know,  
They talk about the credit of the place—  
The Doctor, when he sounded me to-day,  
Said never a word about last night; and lo,  
Her custom'd smile lights up the Nurse's face.

## FROM "THYREA"

*a Sonnet Sequence from a Sanatorium*

### III

#### "ON TOUR"

S LIGHTLY deformed, he filled a sort of gap,  
Serving the chief buffoon as foil and butt,  
And drollish were the capers that he cut,  
And wry his features when he "took the nap";  
He carried on, through good and evil hap,  
Till Tuesday last, when, resting "on the side,"  
He coughed a bit, and lo! the arterial tide,  
Crimson and warm, incarnadined his lap.

I saw him in his little room to-night,  
Saw the dew'd temples and the sunken cheek,  
And *knew* the shadow of death was stealing on. . . .  
He told me he had fixed it up all right  
To join the troupe at Wigan, Monday week,  
Or Monday fortnight *sure* at Warrington.



# ANDREW GRAHAM GRIEVE

JUNE MEMORY—DEATH



## JUNE MEMORY

**I**N a green delightful place  
Where the slim boughs interlace  
And the shadows skip and chase  
Elfin-wise across the sward,  
Oh, in bright-eyed harmony  
Sings a friendly little bird  
Privately to me.

Sings in freshly-springing tune  
How one night in midmost June  
Underneath a sickle moon  
Cupid shot a feathered dart,  
Twanging like a fairy's sigh  
Straightly at his open heart  
Through the hushing sky.

Tells then, honest little bird,  
How to wildering wildness stirred  
Singing till the heavens heard  
All his ache he eased in song.  
Now the self-same remedy  
Sends my sorrows up along  
In quick songs from me!

## DEATH

**I** KNOW that in some tender flushing dawn  
Swift speeding to me from life's busier seas  
A ship will ride all gracely as a swan  
With silken sails that glimmer on the breeze  
When you, my love, adventure smilingly  
Beneath the arches of eternity.

# DONALD A. MACKENZIE \*

ISLE OF MY HEART—THE TINKER'S BABY—THE  
ISLAND MAID'S LAMENT—FREE WILL—THE SONG  
OF THE BANNOCK—THE BANSHEE—THE BLUE  
MEN OF THE MINCH—THE HOLY WELL

\* Donald A. Mackenzie, Edinburgh, is a native of Cromarty and a descendant of the eighteenth-century Gaelic bard, Rob Donn. He has drawn his inspiration mainly from Gaelic folk-life and literature. The impressionable years of his youth were spent in Argyllshire. He is the author of two books of verse, *The Riddle of Life* and *Elves and Heroes*, and a number of volumes in prose, dealing with the archæology and religious beliefs of ancient civilisations, including *Wonder Tales from Scottish Myth and Legend*, *Myths of Crete and Pre-Hellenic Europe*, *Myths of Babylonia and Assyria*, *Egyptian Myth and Legend*, *Indian Myth and Legend*, etc. He has done a great deal of folk-lore collecting in the Lowlands and Highlands.



## ISLE OF MY HEART

I'M sighing here my lone-self  
In a foreign land and fair,  
Where the sun is ever gleaming  
And I can live at ease;  
For it's me that will be dreaming  
Of the dear days that were,  
On that jewel of an island  
In the sweet Hebrides.

The little island of my heart,  
Ah! cold it is and bare,  
It's bleak wi' rain and black wi' peat  
And hungry in the foam;  
But oh! it's heartsome and it's sweet,  
It's me that would be there,  
For they're good folk, they're warm folk,  
They're fine folk at home.

I'm wondering if my mother  
Will be sitting by her door,  
With her spinning-wheel at even  
That's humming like the bee—  
She'll be bent and grey with grieving  
O'er the dear days of yore,  
And her old heart will be hungry  
For her sons across the sea.

My father will be growing frail  
With delving in the croft—  
I mind well the sweet smell  
New broken from the land;—  
A blackbird pipes above the well,  
And eve is falling soft:  
He'll be old and worn wi' working,  
Like the spade that's in his hand.

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

It's a poor land, a dour land,  
A hard land and cold,  
The young grow weary of its yoke  
And east and west they roam.  
There's little left for poor folk  
When they'll be growing old,  
But it's near to me and dear to me,  
That island of my home.



## THE TINKER'S BABY

**T**HE poet, wand'ring on the moor,  
Came to a camp of tinkers poor,  
And saw upon the heather laid  
A baby cradled in a plaid.

Low burned the fire; the wind was cold;  
The baby but a few hours old,  
Washed by the tinker in a stream,  
Was slumbering in a golden dream.

'Twas strange to think that spark of life,  
Low flick'ring, could withstand the strife  
Which stricken warriors wage for breath  
When taken in the loops of death. . . .

That frail life, like a daisy sweet  
At mercy of all passing feet,  
Of with'ring sun and blighting storm,  
With loveliness of hue and form. . . .

That life mysterious and strange,  
Made captive in this world of change,  
Beginning, as all lives begin,  
Unstained by folly or by sin. . . .

That life immune to love and hate,  
Indifferent to death and fate,  
Knowing nor hope, nor fear, nor care,  
Mute, unresponsive, unaware. . . .

That life unsought and incomplete,  
That wonder lying at his feet,  
Which yet could make its sure appeal  
Entrancing through the senses steal,  
Like to a sweet, alluring ditty  
Which fills the heart with love and pity. . . .

The poet pondered, sighing oft,  
Then smiled; for smiled in slumber soft  
That babe, so beautiful, so pure—  
A rosebud wild upon the moor.

## THE ISLAND MAID'S LAMENT

WHITE bird of the ocean,  
With lovelorn emotion,  
I follow thy flight o'er  
The grey silver sea.  
For the soul of me sighing,  
Would like thee be flying  
To where in the sea-fold  
My love calls for me.

O Angus, mine own love,  
My lost love, my lone love,  
Unresting as restless  
Dumb waves of the deep,  
Ah! would I were near thee,  
To comfort and cheer thee,  
Then soft would thy dreams be  
And gentle thy sleep.

Yon dew-mists that creep o'er  
Wan seaway and dimmed shore,  
Seem wraiths from the death-cold  
Doom-deeps of the sea.  
Or asleep, or awaken,  
I mourn thee forsaken—  
Fair soul from the sea-fold  
Aye calling for me.

## FREE WILL

SAY not the will of man is free  
Within the limits of his soul—  
Who from his heritage can flee?  
Who can his destiny control?

In vain we wage perpetual strife  
'Gainst instincts dumb and blind desires—  
Who leads must serve. The pulse of life  
Throbs with the dictates of our sires.

Since when the world began to be,  
And life through hidden purpose came,  
From sire to son unceasingly  
The task bequeathed hath been the same.

We strive, while fetters bind us fast;  
We seek to do what needs must be—  
We move through bondage with the past  
In service to posterity.

## THE SONG OF THE BANNOCK

OH! the good-wife will be singing  
When her meal is all but done:  
“Now all my bannocks have I baked;  
I’ve baked them all but one;  
And I’ll dust the board to bake it,  
I’ll bake it with a spell—  
Oh! it’s Finlay’s little bannock  
For going to the well.\*  
The bannock on the brander  
Smells sweet for your desire—  
Oh! my crisp ones I will count not  
On two sides of the fire;  
Ah! not a farl has fallen  
Some evil to foretell—  
Here’s Finlay’s little bannock  
For going to the well.  
The bread would not be lasting,  
’Twould crumble in your hand,  
If fairies should be coming here  
To turn the meal to sand.  
But what will keep them dancing  
In their own green dell?  
Oh! it’s Finlay’s little bannock  
For going to the well.  
Now, not a fairy finger  
Will do my baking harm—  
The little bannock with the hole,  
Oh! it will be the charm.  
I’ll knead it, knead it, ’twixt my palms, †  
And all the bairns I’ll tell,  
Oh! it’s Finlay’s little bannock  
For going to the well.”

\* “Finlay’s little bannock” charmed the baking. It was given to a child for bringing water from a magic well. The charm was completed by the child’s service. Fairies took “the substance” from uncharmed bread.

† It must not be baked on the board. The children should not be told why it is baked, lest the charm be broken.

## THE BANSHEE

**K**NEE-DEEP she waded in the pool—  
The Banshee robed in green:  
Singing her song the whole night long,

She washed the linen clean;  
The linen that will wrap the dead  
She beetled on a stone,  
She washed with dripping hands, blood-red,  
Low singing all alone:

*The Banshee I with second sight,  
Singing in the cold starlight;  
I wash the death-clothes pure and white,  
For Fergus More must die to-night.*

'Twas Fergus More rode o'er the hill,  
Come back from foreign wars;  
His horse's feet were clattering sweet  
Below the pitiless stars;  
And in his heart he'd oft repeat:

“Oh, never again I'll roam;  
All weary is the going forth,  
But sweet the coming home.”

*The Banshee I with second sight,  
Singing in the cold starlight;  
I wash the death-clothes pure and white,  
For Fergus More must die to-night.*

He saw the blaze upon his hearth  
Bright gleaming down the glen.

Oh! he was fain for home again!—

He'd parted with his men.

“'Tis many a weary day,” he'd sigh,

“Since I did leave her side;

I'll never more leave Scotland's shore,

And Una Ban, my bride.”

*The Banshee I with second sight,  
Singing in the cold starlight;  
I wash the death-clothes pure and white,  
For Fergus More must die to-night.*

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

At thought of Una's tender love,  
Soft tears his eyes did blind . . .  
Then up there crept and swiftly leapt  
A man who stabbed behind.  
"Tis you," he cried, "who stole my bride—  
This night shall be your last!" . . .  
As Fergus fell, the warm, red tide  
Of life came ebbing fast.

*The Banshee I with second sight,  
Singing in the cold starlight;  
I wash the death-clothes pure and white,  
For Fergus More must die to-night.*

## THE BLUE MEN OF THE MINCH

WHEN the tide is at the turning, and the wind is fast  
asleep,  
And not a wave is curling on the wide, blue deep,  
Oh! the waters will be churning in the stream that never  
smiles,  
Where the Blue Men are splashing round the charmed  
isles.\*

As the summer wind goes droning o'er the sun-bright seas,  
And the Minch is all a-dazzle to the Hebrides,  
They will skim along like salmon — you can see their  
shoulders gleam,  
And the flashing of their fingers in the Blue Men's Stream.

But when the blast is raving and the wild tide races,  
The Blue Men are breast-high with foam-grey faces;  
They'll plunge along with fury while they sweep the spray  
behind:  
Oh! they'll bellow o'er the billows and wail upon the wind.

And if my boat be storm-tossed and beating for the bay,  
They'll be howling and be growling as they drench it with  
their spray —  
For they'd like to heel it over to their laughter when it lists,  
Or crack the keel between them, or stave it with their fists.

Oh! weary on the Blue Men, their anger and their wiles!  
The whole day long, the whole night long, they're splash-  
ing round the isles;  
They'll follow every fisher — ah! they'll haunt the fisher's  
dream —  
When billows toss, oh! who would cross the Blue Men's  
Stream!

\* The "Blue Men" (*Na Fir Ghorm*) are storm-fairies of the sea. They haunt the "Stream of the Blue Men" (*Sruth nam Fear Gorm*) between Lewis and the Shant Isles (*Na h-Eileinean siant*, "the charmed isles"). This strait is restless even in calm weather.

## THE HOLY WELL \*

'TIS for thee I will be pining,  
*Tober Voorie!*  
Thou art deep and sweet and shining,  
*Tober Voorie!*  
In the dimness I'll be dying,  
And my soul for thee is sighing  
With the blessings on thee lying—  
*Tober Voorie!*

Oh! thy cool, sweet waters dripping,  
*Tober Voorie!*  
Now my sere lips would be sipping,  
*Tober Voorie!*  
Oh! my lips are sere and burning,  
For thy waters I'll be yearning  
And yon road of no returning,  
*Tober Voorie!*

Oh! thy coolness and thy sweetness,  
*Tober Voorie!*  
Oh! thy sureness and completeness,  
*Tober Voorie!*  
Oh! this life I will be leaving,  
With the greyness of its grieving,  
And the deeps of its deceiving—  
*Tober Voorie!*

I shall sip thy waters holy,  
*Tober Voorie!*  
While the drops of life drip slowly,  
*Tober Voorie!*  
Till the wings of angel whiteness,  
With their softness and their lightness,  
Blind me, fold me in their brightness,  
*Tober Voorie!*

\* In Gaelic *Tober Mhuire* ("Well of St Mary"). It is situated at Tarradale, Ross and Cromarty. The request of a sick person for the well-water is regarded as an indication that death is near.



# RODERICK WATSON KERR

THE MISSION—THE CORPSE—THE GRAVE-DIGGER  
—FROM THE LINE—REBUKE—A MOOD



# THE MISSION

*from the "English Review"*

'TIS dingy bright; a lady smirks and sings  
In evening dress so rare and rich it brings  
Down heaven to the poor—the poor that swarm  
The Mission hall in filthy rags not warm  
Enough for dogs. The lady's singing done,  
She bows and flutters to her seat. "What fun  
It is to sing in here!" she thinks. "Poor things,  
They need some music in their lives; it brings  
Such happiness you see!" Oh, Art for woe—  
A one-time prima donna sits below,  
Besmattered, bleary-eyed, in rags!

Around

Comes tea—philanthropy must know no bound—  
And buns—weeks old, but oh, twopence the lot  
How very cheap! Magnanimous, God wot!  
Quite fit for gentle ladies' palates—God!  
And monkeys in a cage get nuts; and, odd  
Enough—oh, very odd!—the tea and buns  
Just cost the soul of any of these ones—  
The female things, I mean. Two pence? Ah, yes,  
That woman's body sells each night for less.  
(How very cheap indeed the buns and tea!)  
But hark! The Preacher speaks: "Ah, friends, I see  
Around, the evidence of sin and drink—  
The evil things that lure you to the brink  
Of hell; that urge your souls to sink bedamned.  
Why, hell, my friends, is with the drunkards crammed.  
Ah, look not on the wine when red and rosy;  
Drink is raging, wine a mockery."  
The Preacher finished, silence for a pause;  
"Damn good!" a drunk man says—then loud applause.

Oh, Words! Oh, Song! Oh, Tea and Currant Buns!  
Out flock the drab and outcast, hopeless ones

## NORTHERN NUMBERS

To make for Home—for Home?—some fetid nest  
In cracked, unwholesome tenements—Oh, Home!  
A worm sleeps sweeter in its dungy loam—  
(*Father's drunk and mother is a bawd.*  
*Oh, Words! Oh, Song! Oh, Tea and Buns—Oh, God!*)

## THE CORPSE

*from "War Daubs." John Lane*

**I**T lay on the hill  
A sack on its face,  
Collarless,  
Stiff and still,  
Its two feet bare,  
And very white,  
Its tunic tossed in sight  
And not a button there—  
Small trace  
Of clothes upon its back—  
Thank God! it had a sack  
Upon its face!

## THE GRAVE-DIGGER

*from "War Daubs." John Lane*

**A**DIGGER he digs in the dark,  
In the naked remains of a wood,  
For his friend that lies stiff and stark,  
On his head hard blood for a hood:

The digging is painful and slow,  
Yet the digger he sweats like a slave;  
But he did not know what I now know:  
The digger he dug his own grave.

## FROM THE LINE

*from "War Daubs." John Lane*

HAVE you seen men come from the Line,  
Tottering, doddering, as if bad wine  
Had drugged their very souls;  
Their garments rent with holes  
And caked with mud  
And streaked with blood

Of others, or their own;  
Haggard, weary-limbed and chilled to the bone  
Trudging aimless, hopeless on,  
With listless eyes and faces drawn  
Taut with woe?

Have you seen them aimless go  
Bowed down with muddy pack  
And muddy rifle slung on back,  
And soaking overcoat,  
Staring on with eyes that note  
Nothing but the mire,  
Quenched of every fire?

Have you seen men when they come  
From shell-holes filled with scum  
Of mud and blood and flesh,  
Where there's nothing fresh,  
Like grass, or trees, or flowers,  
And the numbing year-like hours  
Lag on—drag on;  
And the hopeless dawn  
Brings naught but death and rain—  
The rain a fiend of pain  
That scourges without end,  
And death a smiling friend?

Have you seen men when they come from hell?  
If not, ah well,

# RODERICK WATSON KERR

Speak not with easy eloquence,  
That seems like sense,  
Of "War and its Necessity!"  
And do not rant I pray  
On "War's Magnificent Nobility!"

If you've seen men come from the Line  
You'll know it's Peace that is divine!  
If you've not seen the things I've sung,  
Let silence bind your tongue,  
But, make all wars to cease;  
And work, and work, for Everlasting Peace!

## REBUKE

*from "War Daubs." John Lane*

**A**S one who was rebuked I stood  
In silence by the sea;  
The stars were pale and faint—a brood  
Of angel-eyes to me.

The dim red flush of evening lay  
Like rose-leaves in the West,  
And fishing-boats slept in the bay  
Like weary birds at rest.

As one who was rebuked I stood  
In wonder by the sea;  
And in the beauty, lo! I could  
Attain Serenity!

## A MOOD

*hitherto unpublished*

**I**AM weary  
Of the day,  
The dreary  
White of day;  
I long for the night—  
My tomb—  
With stars to light  
The gloom:  
And the wind wailing through the leafless trees will  
comfort me;  
And my lullaby will be the black rain beating in the  
night desolately.



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